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THE DESIGN STRUCTURE OF MY PAINTINGS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
" TO COLOR, SHAPE, AND SPACE

by

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Design structure is the basic underlying principle found in all my painting. This design structure is not just a well ordered arrangement of colored shapes on canvas, but a balance of expression and disciplined structure.

Like many artists in history, my painting is motivated by an insistent need for order and structural design. Experiment has strengthened my realization that the validity of the work is primarily governed by this inner necessity.

My way of painting is not unique, but the way I express my ideas on canvas can be unique. This uniqueness of the artistic process is a reflection of the artist's own life and personality. Therefore, I feel that the artist should be able to discuss his work better than most critics and estheticians.

My work does not require elaborate or obscure analysis. The design structure as an underlying principle is concrete and there to be seen; however, concrete things need not be simple. Complex ideas can be expressed by the subtle use of color, shape, and space.

The final structure of the painting depends on the intuitive and conscious use of color, shape, and space. Each painter is selective in his individual use of these elements. I prefer straight lines to curving ones, geometric forms to forms in nature. The rectilinear forms, the straight lines, of my man-made environment motivate my work.

In my choice of colors, again, I have a preference for those that are characteristic of the man-made world, rather than those found in the natural world. I rarely use the earth colors of the landscape painter. I like to use all the flat tones of orange, red, purple, and blue against predominately neutral or pure white backgrounds.

The relationships of shapes in size, color, and position to the immediate surrounding space and to the entire canvas give the painting its spatial expression. Colored shapes may appear static or moving; tensions develop between one shape and another; the sensation of space may be increased with the use of more colored shapes. With each painting I become more aware of the infinite possibilities of this interaction in space.

Color, shape, and space are all indispensable parts of the design structure of my painting, and I am constantly aware that all these elements must be used in a vital way to produce a unique work. Arnheim writes that "the mature work of art succeeds in subjecting everything to a dominant law of structure. In doing so, it does not distort the variety of existing things into uniformity. On the contrary, it clarifies their differences by making them all comparable."

In like manner, the painter can clarify his work by self-awareness. To me the achievement of self-awareness is most difficult and most essential. This difficulty holds true in my life as well as in my work. After years of working toward structure in my life, I realize that I am only beginning to find a similar structure in my painting.

My title refers to the organization of my painting conceived as an abstract arrangement of colored shapes within the space of the canvas. Design is essential to this organization. I use the word "design" as it has been used by Matisse, among other well-known painters, to refer to an integral element of his work, not as it is so often misapplied to empty ornamentation.

The design structure to which I refer is not, therefore, an end in itself but an underlying principle basic to all my painting. Design in this sense applies not only to a well ordered arrangement of colored shapes on canvas, but to a balance of expression and disciplined structure.

My work has always been motivated by an insistent need for order and structural design. Whether it goes back to early training in commercial art or to my strong feeling for architecture, I only know that I am temperamentally unable to paint in any other way. In the past few years, surrounded by abstract expressionism and other "isms", I have experimented in various styles for short periods. Experiment has strengthened my realization that the validity of painting is primarily governed by inner necessity. This realization, in turn, has strengthened my work. Today my approach to painting is essentially

the same as when I first began.

Throughout history, there have been some artists who were guided by inner necessity to produce work with a profound sense of order. Disciplined structural strength and relentless elimination of nonessentials mark the work of such artists. Bach's fugues have much in common with the compositions of Piero della Francesca, Poussin, and Cezanne. The work of such artists as these is the work I most admire.

Variations in artistic expression found in different times and among different people prove the existence of many valid approaches to art. Art depends not on form or technique but on the effectiveness of their use in realizing the artist's purpose.

All painting contains structure but it is structure as the primary element that answers my inner necessity. My way of painting, call it abstract, non-objective, hard-edge, or whatever, is not unique, but the way I express my ideas on canvas can be unique. To me, this uniqueness of the artistic process is a reflection of the individual's own life and personality. Like Alfred Barr, I believe that painters make more sense discussing their own work than do most critics and estheticians.¹ Therefore I believe that painters should make the effort to

¹Katharine Kuh, The Artist's Voice (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), front flap.

speak for themselves rather than leave it to others. Arnheim writes that there has been enough of "the dazzling obscurity of arty talk, the juggling with catchwords and dehydrated aesthetic concepts, the pseudo-scientific window dressing, the impertinent hunting for clinical symptoms, the elaborate measurement of trifles, and the charming epigrams."¹

My work does not require elaborate or obscure analysis. The design structure as an underlying principle is concrete and there to be seen; however, concrete things need not be simple. Complex ideas can be expressed by the subtle use of color, shape, and space.

Although I begin all my paintings with some plan in mind, it often changes and develops as the painting progresses. To me, painting is a form of thinking, carried out step by step. It progresses from one shape and color to another, but always toward a structured whole. Often the first shape or color is not satisfactory and must be painted out or balanced by another shape or color, to preserve the structure. I rarely exploit accidents in my work, and then only if they strengthen it.

This method of painting is sometimes thought of as being cold and sterile in that it relies more on the

¹Rudolf Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), p. ix.

intellect than on the emotions. I believe it would be more accurate to say that it relies on the intellectual control of the emotions. The way one uses color and shape in space, one's choice of color and shape, is influenced by emotion as well as thought. Feeling may be subject to judgment, but the feeling must be there. I agree with Stuart Davis when he writes that paintings are "...made by competent workmen outside the self --- not as a signed convulsion communicating an enormous capacity for frustration with the outside."¹

The final structure of the painting, its realization in paint on canvas, depends on the intuitive and the conscious use of color, shape, and space. They are all indispensable to the work which embodies the whole being of the painter. Each painter is selective in his individual use of these elements. I prefer straight lines to curving ones, geometric forms to the forms of nature. The rectilinear forms, the straight lines, of my man-made environment motivate my work. As I am surrounded by buildings, streets, and machines, their straight contours are the ones with which I work.

The moment a single shape is painted upon the canvas, the picture surface assumes a spatial quality. The relationships of shapes in size, color, and position to the immediate surrounding space and to the entire canvas

Georgy Kepes, The Visual Arts Today (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1960), p. 120.

give the painting its spatial expression. Shapes may appear static or moving; tensions develop between one shape and another; the sensation of space may be increased with the use of more shapes. There can be no absolute quality of shape because each is influenced by the other shapes and the whole composition. With each painting I become more aware of the infinite possibilities of interaction.

Even more vital relationships occur when shapes are articulated in color. Just as the perception of shapes always depends on the surrounding shapes, colors are intensified or weakened by interaction with other colors. Hue and value may likewise be changed. The color, then, will play an important role in the organization of the picture plane. It may also be used for its emotional effect.

In my choice of colors, again, I have a preference for those that are characteristic of the man-made world, rather than those found in the natural world. I rarely use the earth colors of the landscape painter. I am more likely to use all the tones of red, purple, orange, and blue. These I use sparingly against predominantly neutral and pure white backgrounds.

In my work the use of color is more intuitive and less conscious than the use of shape. I like to use flat colors which I often separate with areas of bare canvas to define them in a direct way. The width of these bare spaces may be varied to regulate the effect of one color upon another.

Color, shape, and space are all indispensable parts of the design structure of my painting, and I am constantly aware that all these elements must be used in a vital way to produce a unique work. Arnheim writes that "the mature work of art succeeds in subjecting everything to a dominant law of structure. In doing so, it does not distort the variety of existing things into uniformity. On the contrary, it clarifies their differences by making them all comparable."¹

In like manner, the painter can clarify his work by self-awareness. To me the achievement of self-awareness is most difficult and most essential. This difficulty holds true in my life as well as in my work. After years of working toward structure in my life, I realize that I am only beginning to find a similar structure in my painting.

¹Rudolf Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), p. 374.

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